

FEDERAL EMPLOYEE VOLUNTEER ASSISTANCE FOR HURRICANE KATRINA RELIEF

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Eligibility

Q: Can government contractors volunteer to go?

A: Government contractors should not volunteer under this program. Contractors are encouraged to check with their employers for information on any relief efforts that may be sponsored by their employers.

Q: Can government retirees volunteer to go?

A: Government retirees are not eligible to volunteer under this program. They are encouraged to volunteer for service with other relief organizations.

Q: Some employees have no Government ID. Is this an issue for FEMA? Does this prevent employees from volunteering?

A: No, this will not prevent an employee from volunteering. If an employee has been identified by his agency and reported to FEMA as eligible to volunteer, the employee does not need a Government ID.

Q: Am I eligible for the program if I am not immediately available?

A: There is currently no expiration on the program and volunteers will be needed for several months. If you are not available now, simply provide the earliest date you will be available.

Duty Status and Pay

Q: What is the duty status for persons who volunteer?

A: The employee volunteers should be maintained in regular duty status. They **are not** on excused absence or any leave status. Volunteers will be issued a hard copy T&A card at their field site. The FEMA supervisor on-site will sign the volunteer's time card and it should be returned to the volunteer's agency timekeeper. It will reflect both regular hours of work and overtime. The overtime can be charged back to FEMA. Further payroll instructions for recovering overtime costs from FEMA will be provided. Regular hours and AUO or LEAP are charged to the employing agency. If the donating agency has a mechanism for tracking or estimating regular pay also, it may be prudent to do so, in case Government costs of the recovery effort are requested at a later date.

Q: What costs are covered by FEMA?

A: Overtime, Sunday pay, shift/night differential, holiday pay, travel costs and per diem, \$15 per week for phone calls, and \$15 per week for laundry. The donating agency continues to pay the employee's base salary. Donating agencies should keep records of these expenses to ensure proper reimbursement by FEMA.

Q: Will FEMA supervisors certify volunteers for hazard pay? Is hazard pay subject to reimbursement through the Disaster Relief Fund?

A: Volunteers to FEMA under this program will not be put in situations that would warrant hazardous duty pay.

Q. What will be my rate of pay?

A: You will be paid at your normal Department of Commerce rate.

Q: Do Federal volunteers get FEMA Federal badges?

A: Yes. All persons who volunteer will receive a FEMA badge.

Deployment

Q: When will I find out if I have been accepted to the program?

A: The Department of Commerce will forward basic contact information to FEMA. FEMA representatives will contact each volunteer. How long it takes to be contacted will depend on the number of volunteers FEMA is processing. You may be contacted during the weekend or at night.

Q: How long is the training class in Orlando Florida?

A: The training is two days in length. Vaccinations will also be given at that time.

Q: How soon will I be deployed?

A: You will be deployed based on dates of availability you will provide FEMA.

Q: May I choose where I am deployed?

A: Unless you are specifically name requested by FEMA to work in DC, you will be deployed to a disaster response area. You will be assigned on the basis of need. Disaster response areas also include states that have taken in large numbers of refugees.

Q: How long can a volunteer expect to be away from home?

A: Volunteer service will typically be for 30 days. Shorter or longer periods of service can be negotiated and accommodated.

Q: Can I be required to stay longer than 30 days or longer than my stated availability period?

A: No. You determine your availability.

Q: If I am deployed to the Gulf Coast, who will be responsible for my housing and food?

A: FEMA will be responsible for your housing and food needs. Additional information on travel cost reimbursement and travel expenses post training will be provided to the volunteers at the time of the training in Orlando.

Q: Why are series, grade and skills not on the spreadsheet for reporting volunteers? Is there some sort of skills screening done in Orlando, or elsewhere?

A: The volunteer's skills will be sorted out in Orlando, prior to deployment to the field. The volunteer will be assigned duties that are of critical need and these may not be directly related to the type of work in which the volunteer is regularly employed. You may work at general tasks, which could include everything from distributing relief materials, to answering telephones and assisting victims with paperwork and computer access. Please remember that you may be assigned to tasks outside your normal duties that may be physical in nature.

Q: Will it be possible for me to deploy to the same location, and at the same time as a friend or spouse?

A: You can attend training at Orlando at the same time. FEMA will make an effort to deploy requesting individuals together, however deployment will be based on need and individual skill sets. Co-deployment cannot be guaranteed.

Q: How will an agency know when its volunteers are deployed?

A: When volunteers reach the Orlando mobilization site, their contact information will be entered into the FEMA database. When the volunteer is deployed, the donating agency will be notified. As this process may take a matter of days, agencies may want to request that the volunteers alert their supervisors prior to their deployment. FEMA is also willing to provide lists of deployed employees to agencies upon request. These may be requested by your agency POC. Questions about deployed employees or emergency contacts may be directed to FEMA at 1-800-440-6728.

Travel

Q: Do I need a government issued travel credit card to participate?

A: Yes, you must have a government issued travel card. If you do not currently have one, and if your supervisor will approve a card for you for this purpose, you may apply

following your bureau's standard application process. When you submit your application, request expedited service. This should take less than seven days to complete.

Q: May I use my personal credit card for travel?

A: No, you must use a government issued travel card.

Q: Do you have guidance on preparation of travel authorizations?

A: The employing agency, not FEMA, should prepare the travel orders.

Travel orders for volunteers who are traveling from outside the local commuting area to training in Orlando, Florida, should be open-ended and assume a minimum 30-day deployment. The employing agency should pay for travel to the training site. FEMA will handle travel arrangements post-training.

Volunteers will attend training in Orlando, Florida and may be immediately re-deployed or may be able to return home and to their jobs prior for a short period prior to being deployed as volunteers. If they are able to return home for a short period, they will be called by FEMA when they are needed.

Additional information on travel cost reimbursement and travel expenses post training will be provided to the volunteers at the time of the training in Orlando.

Q: How does the reimbursement for volunteers' travel work? Should the donating agency put the employee on travel orders?

A: The volunteer employee uses his/her Government travel card while volunteering for disaster relief. When the employee arrives at the Orlando training site, s/he will be given claim forms for reimbursement. The employee will also be advised concerning procedures for scheduling any future travel, which will be done through the FEMA travel service. The donor agency will process travel reimbursement following normal procedures and will be reimbursed by FEMA. The agency should put the employee who is volunteering on open-ended travel orders for thirty days, though the volunteer may return home sooner.

Q: May I drive to Orlando for training, rather than fly?

A: Driving to the Orlando training may not be a wise choice as volunteers generally return home from the site to which they are deployed. FEMA travel is usually only one-way.

Q: May a volunteer travel to and from his/her FEMA volunteer duties, for a home visit?

A: If a volunteer has stayed longer than thirty (30) days, s/he may travel round-trip to visit home, for which FEMA will reimburse the donating agency.

Medical

Q: Does FEMA perform any sort of medical screening prior to deployment to a field location to determine if volunteers are fit to perform the work assigned?

A: No, FEMA does not perform a medical screening, though FEMA does provide any needed inoculations, such as for tetanus, prior to deployment to the field. If a FEMA volunteer trainer sees that a volunteer will clearly not be up to the physical demands of the volunteer assignment, it might be possible for FEMA to deploy the volunteer to less arduous tasks. It is presumed that the donating agency and the volunteer believe the volunteer is fit for the duties associated with the volunteer work.

Q: Is psychological preparation included in the training and does FEMA provide for post-deployment de-briefing?

A: Yes. There is both pre-deployment and post-deployment support for volunteers.

Q: What happens if a volunteer is injured and needs to file a Worker's Compensation claim?

A: A FEMA on-site supervisor will assist the volunteer with his/her claim, and the volunteer will file the claim with his/her donating agency for processing. Costs will be borne by the donating agency and are not reimbursable through the Disaster Relief Fund (DRF).

Family

Q: What phone number can agencies or volunteers' families call to contact the volunteer in case of emergency? What phone number can a volunteer call for more information, after s/he has been reported by his/her agency as eligible to perform volunteer work?

A: 1-866-896-8003

Q: May I bring family members with me?

A: You will be traveling to a disaster area with potentially less than optimal living conditions. Additional personnel not associated with the disaster response and recovery could require resources better dedicated to disaster victims. In addition, disaster sites can be psychologically disturbing, particularly for children or those unfamiliar with these environments. You may be working long hours and have little time for family activities. For these reasons, family members should not accompany you.